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THE LOTUS MAGAZINE

Volume X

February, 1919

Number 2

A NOTE ON THE NEW MARTYRDOM

BY GILBERT K. CHESTERTON

IF ever, in time or eternity, there remains for man a real rest from war, it must be because man is too great for war. It must not be because war is too great for man. It must be a sign that men are too good for such a thing to be inflicted; not that the thing itself is too bad to be endured. That is the vital schism in morals involved in most serious differences on the subject; that is what ultimately divides the highest sort of peace-maker from the lowest sort of peace-monger. If the evil is to be absent, it shall be because we have routed it; not because we have fled from it. This is a principle which exists quite apart from the controversy about whether war is a normal and recurrent tragedy, like toil and bereavement, or a temporary and remediable tragedy, like negro slavery or Chinese tortures. Even of the evils which we were able to remove, and right to remove, it is still true that they were things which, in the last resort, we should be able to sustain and right to sustain. They could never be things to be endured in the sense of tolerated: but they would and should be things to be endured in the sense of defied. We may be glad that the

Christians abolished the cruel sports in the pagan amphitheatre; but we are not glad because nobody was left with the courage to enter the arena. We may be glad that the armies of the French Revolution trod out the last embers of the Spanish Inquisition; but it is not because the French soldiers were afraid to burn their fingers, or their feet, but rather because they were not afraid. Those two examples alone would prove that the argument cuts entirely the other way. The same Christians originally gained credit not by escaping torments but by accepting them; and themselves suffering the same things in the same theatre. And the humanitarian ideal of the eighteenth century did not triumph until the humanitarians had themselves suffered much inhumanity, and even inflicted not a little. The red flag was never to be mistaken for the white flag; nor was it dyed only with the blood of its glorious defenders. Everywhere those who have been strong enough to break the scourges have been those strong enough to bear the scourging. It is the riddle of misrule that those who could not bear it would have to bear it. It is the paradox of the very nature of

valour and revolt, that if tyranny were truly intolerable it would be eternal. It was those who could bear it who could break it.

It is an awful thing that those should say this who cannot themselves suffer the worst of war or persecution. But it would be much worse if they said the opposite. Those who meet St. Lawrence coming from the gridiron may well be ashamed to speak to him at all. But if they say a single word, it can only be of congratulation. It would be far worse that they should tell him that another turn on the gridiron would have forced him to submit. It would be far worse to tell him that the fire would at last be stronger than he, when he had just shown himself stronger than the fire. He might well be able to pardon any form of contempt except that form of compassion. We cannot apologize, therefore, for applauding soldiers for soldiering; applause is the only utterance that has any decency at all. If we think that we ourselves could never bear such things, we must applaud them more; we have the right to question our own heroism, no right whatever to question theirs. And it is questioning theirs to talk of the war of the future as a Nihilistic nightmare not to be resisted by any mortal virtue. Men of genius, by no means petty panic-mongers, have painted such appalling visions of universal panic; and the idea lends itself to the imagery of a cosmic collapse, not only of sun and stars (which does not matter so much) but of the soul of man, which does matter and is perhaps the one thing that does. But all this apocalyptic pessimism resolves itself really into the logical process of telling a boy who has faced a pistol that he would be afraid of a rifle; or rewarding him for the courage with which he encountered a rifle by saying that he would run away from a field-gun. It is not a generous dis-

covery even when it is a genuine one; and a little historical imagination and comparison would show that it is not even genuine. There are only superficial changes in military methods; and there is no change in military morals. There is not the smallest reason to suppose that Scævola, who was not afraid of fire, would have been afraid of firearms. There is nothing whatever to suggest that Sir Richard Grenville, who defied a fleet of ships, would not have defied a fleet of flying-ships.

So much may be postulated about lawful faith and hope in human heroism, and about the just salute to heroes. What is really unpardonable is to tell Hercules, at the end of his twelve labours, that he would find thirteen an unlucky number. What is unendurable in any case is to tell Scævola, when he has put his right hand in the flame, that his left hand will teach him more terrible things, or, worse still, will teach him tamer things. And it is because there is in so much of the current pacifism this suggestion of a still panic, that it nowhere commends itself to the popular instinct of right and wrong. Sane and simple people may be impressed by being told that the peace of the future will be the best ever established; they will not be impressed by being told that the war of the future will be the worst ever waged. But they will be the more convinced of the security of the best because it is founded on the suffering of the worst. If there be indeed any opportunity now opening before us for a more honest social relation or a larger development of local and personal liberties, it will be a positive advantage to that order that it has passed through this furnace seven times heated; yes, and would even be ready for the eighth time. That commonwealth will certainly stand firmer because any who think to assail it know for what weary years of

war it would be ready to resist assault. And that is why even the cripples and the prematurely decrepit of this seeming dance of death will yet be a reassuring as well as a rousing element, even in a happier dance of life. It will truly be a dance led by the halt and the lame, as in some old fantasy of miraculous healing. It will be long before the last of the human ruins this war has made gives place to a happier generation. But even in an earthly paradise they would never be disfigurements;

rather they will be decorations, more real than any decorations that they wear. And they will be something more, which the world will do well to understand. They will be a threat and a defiance. They will remind any who plot a reaction towards shame and bondage, of what men have borne and would bear again to avert them. They who can no longer be soldiers shall still be sentinels; or rather they shall be heralds, telling with a trumpet the terms on which we hold the peace.—*Reveille.*

THE VICTORY OF SAMOTHRACE

[*The headless statue, standing on a prow, now in the Louvre*]

By H. M.

Queen of the Louvre, uplifted on that prow
The symbol of thy native Samothrace,
France is thy second home, thy mother now,
And did not see thy face.

Yet showed the kinship clear. Those wings are wide,
To meet the wind, above the prow, outspread.
So France went forward on the battle-tide,
Nor stayed to count her dead.

True daughter, image true! The head is gone,
Yet through the marble breathes a living soul.
So France by hurt is quickened, and a non
Her faith shall make her whole.

Daughter of France, go forward on that prow,
The symbol of our world-wide island race,
Lille, safe beneath those wings, is dreaming now
And sees the long-lost face.

—*Saturday Review.*